
MUSIC AND CAMPAIGNS

Should Recording Artists Get Political?

By Gerry Dantone

Next Workshop

September 13

The next songwriting workshop is at 7:30 p.m.

Oct. 7 at Five Towns College in Dix Hills.

Frank Gambino

Releases CD

ISS member Frank Gambino released his long-awaited CD, "If Ignorance is Bliss, How Come You're So Sad?"

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In August, Bruce Springsteen, REM, John Mellencamp, the Dixie Chicks and other high-profile recording artists announced they would be participating in a month of concerts in the so-called "swing states" around the nation in an overt effort to get the vote out – for Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry.

Yes, that's right, it is a partisan campaign organized by a number of very partisan political action groups on behalf of a specific candidate for a specific office. This is not your older sister's "Rock the Vote Campaign," where artists are simply exhorting people to vote; no, no, no. This campaign wants you to vote in a particular way (or not vote at all!)

Is there something wrong in all this? Should anyone care what a pop star says? Are they narcissistic attention seekers who should be put in their place? Should they be boycotted?

Well, no.

By now we have learned that one of the world's most knowledgeable and eloquent spokespersons on any number of important global issues is Bono, of the rock band U2. Indeed, he knows his stuff better than many, well yeah, *most* elected officials and cabinet ministers. That he can rock is irrelevant. What he *says* is informed, reasonable and compassionate – isn't that what should matter?

Reason and compassion should be the standard by which we judge individuals who demand our attention and respect; are they reasonable and is their approach committed to uplifting humanity? This standard, by the way, is a standard that is not all that accepted by Americans, and humanity in general. Many leaders and followers are persons who couldn't care less about reason and humanity's situation; they are political or religious fundamentalists (or sympathetic) and are quite influential in how the world operates, unfortunately.

We must therefore look each artist over closely and decide: Are they full of themselves or have they taken the time to reach conclusions based on evidence, reason and concern for the lives of other?

How does a Bruce Springsteen measure up to this standard? In a New York Times Op-ed piece he wrote, "A nation's artists and musicians have a particular place in its social and political life. Over the years I've tried to think long and hard about what it means to be American: about the distinctive identity and position we have in the world, and how that position is best carried. I've tried to write songs that speak to our pride and criticize our failures.

"These questions are at the heart of this election: Who we are, what we stand for, why we fight. Personally, for the last 25 years I have always stayed one step away from partisan politics. Instead, I have been partisan about a set of ideals: economic justice, civil rights, a humane foreign policy, freedom and a decent life for all of our citizens. This year, however, for many of us the stakes have risen too high to sit this election out..."

Whatever your political preference, it's hard to fault someone for obeying a reasoned and compassionate conscience.

Gerry Dantone is President of Long Island Secular Humanists

Suzanne Ernst to release her first CD

By Pedro Pereira

ISS member **Suzanne Ernst**, she of the breezy melodies and thoughtful lyrics, is readying her debut CD for release this fall. Suzanne has recorded some 15 tracks at ISS member **Vinny Crici's** recording studio in recent months, and is now moving toward the final phase of the recording process.

"I am shooting to go back into the studio in mid to end of August, and hoping for a completed CD a month or two after that," Suzanne said, adding she was in the process of copyrighting the songs that will be on the CD.

Suzanne has recorded vocals and guitar for 15 songs, with Vinny, her husband Doug and herself co-producing the project. Vinny is playing additional instruments.

I am shooting to go back into the studio in mid to end of August, and hoping for a completed CD a month or two after that.

— *Suzanne Ernst*

"Vinny is doing a great job. He wears many hats during the sessions — musician, producer, technician, and most importantly, friend," Suzanne said. "Doug is our anchor, keeping us on schedule and focused, providing the view of the listener/audience, and adding his own artistic integrity to the experience. His support is immeasurable."

Suzanne joined ISS about two years ago and has provided the organization with some of the most memorable songs that are played at the monthly songwriting workshops. She has a fluid guitar-playing style and an angelic voice that are sure to make the CD worth listening to. Look for more details on Suzanne's debut CD in these pages when it is released.

Bill Goldsmith Gets NPR Exposure

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"'Cloud of Smoke' was influenced by the Sept. 11 attacks, although it doesn't specifically make reference to them," said Bill. "Instead, the song concerns itself with what I see as a terrible predilection some people have for destroying things. The lyrics of the middle section sum up what I was trying to say: 'One person's nightmare/Is another person's dream fulfilled/They spend their time knocking down/Something they could never build.'"

After their week in the limelight, the songs showcased on NPR's Open Mic remain accessible through a drop-down menu on the left-hand side of the web page. If you want to listen, go to the site and select "Stage 44" from the drop-down menu.

Promote Yourself on the ISS Web Site

The ISS is now offering songwriters *their own web pages* on the ISS web site. Whether you already have your own web site or not, a personal web page on the ISS site brings you closer to the traffic with a polished and professional look. If you don't already have a web site, it is an especially good deal. Prices range from \$20 to \$60 per year with a range of options.

Plus, you are supporting ISS web site development. So if you like the way the web site is going, you can help *keep it going* by signing up. Please see the web site for details: <http://www.islandsonwriters.org>

Writer's Choice

by Gerry Dantone

The Writer's Choice winners in August were **Michael Svezia** for "I Sing for my Supper" and **Lois Morton** for "I'll Remember You."

In a continuing theme of diversity, we not only had an atypical genre win Writer's Choice for the month, we had two winners in the most closely contested election since the year 2000. Of course, in the ISS, the winners were those who received the most votes.

Michael composed a jaunty calypso-styled tune that explained why he had to sing for his supper, and, oh, what a litany of problems it was!

Unemployment, inflation, a bad stock market and even nuclear fallout dogged the protagonist who liked to sing but loved to eat.

Lois introduced a tune that was a throwback but was appreciated all the same. Her simple but sincere lyrics to a lost loved one were touching while never too sweet. Singing the last two verses in French was a nice touch, and the fine singing was an added bonus.

Hot on the heels of the winners were numerous runners-up: **Tony Tedeschi**, **Frank Gambino**, **Walter Sargent** and yours truly all were within a hanging chad of the ultimate winners in an evening that produced too many good tunes and not enough stinkers. This voting thing is tough!

Gerry Dantone counted the paper ballots, which are available for audit.

Rockers Turn Up Political Heat

By Pedro Pereira

Democratic Presidential Nominee John Kerry should have an easy enough time defeating George W. Bush this November, considering the fiasco the current administration has turned out to be. Yet, in most polls Kerry has yet to pull ahead decisively. This may have to do with Bush's war chest or the Democratic Party's inability to put up a candidate that stirs the passions of enough Americans to vote against the incumbent.

Thankfully for Kerry, a number of high-profile rock 'n rollers is about to step up the pressure on Bush by touring together in an effort to raise awareness about the current administration's disastrous policies. The Los Angeles Times reported July 25 that Bruce Springsteen, Neil Young, R.E.M., Pearl Jam, Dixie Chicks, Dave Matthews Band and Steve Earle, among others, are planning to target swing states this fall for a politically minded tour aimed at encouraging people to vote out Bush.

Chances are heavyweights Bob Dylan and James Taylor will also join the tour. Throw in a couple of other high-profile acts, such as the Rolling Stones and Cheryl Crow, (neither of which has been reported to be joining the tour) and Dubya might as well start packing for a permanent relocation to Crawford.

_____The pundits always like to say a Southerner has to be on the ticket for the Democrats to have a chance at winning, hence the choice of Edwards. But have you ever heard Springsteen talk? _____ The man sounds Southern to me.

_____As I write this, the Democrats are disrupting the daily lives of Boston residents and workers with their staged convention. John Kerry got booed at a Yankees-Red Sox game at Fenway Park. And writers for left-wing publications seem to be holding their noses as they halfheartedly throw their support behind the Kerry campaign.

It may just take The Boss himself, New Jersey's favorite son Bruce Springsteen, to help the lackluster Democrats. Really, if Kerry had thought this thing through, he would have named Bruce as his running mate, instead of pretty-boy Edwards from South Carolina. The pundits always like to say a Southerner has to be on the ticket for the Democrats to have a chance at winning, hence the choice of Edwards. But have you ever heard Springsteen talk? The man sounds Southern to me. And he sure can sling a Tele!

Alas, Bruce and Co. will likely best serve the timid Democratic Party by doing what rockers do best — turn up the volume in front of a screaming audience. This may be the first time an election gets decided not on the persona and policies of a candidate, but the charisma and popularity of his high-profile supporters, though I have my doubts about how many minds these rock 'n rollers can sway.

In any case, Bush seems impervious to most attacks. Michael Moore's anti-Bush "Fahrenheit 9/11" tops \$100 million at the box office, breaking all kinds of records, and Kerry still has trouble pulling ahead in the polls. A continuous barrage of anti-Bush books, including one that psychoanalyzes him as sadistic and paranoid, (just thought I'd throw that in) and Kerry still has trouble pulling ahead.

Will rock make the difference? Doubtful. But hey, some people believe Dylan ended the Vietnam War. And perhaps the sum of all this high-profile anti-Bush activity will help Kerry. But if he loses, it's time for the Democrats to get serious about being a real opposition party, rather than one that isn't just quite as bad as the Republicans.

If nothing else, enjoy Bruce if he comes to your town. Of course, since New York isn't a swing state, you may have to travel to see him. Oh heck, just go to Best Buy and get is fine "Live in Barcelona" DVD. At least you'll get your digital fill of The Boss.

Who Played What

Here's the list of songwriters and songs from the August ISS workshop:

Steve & Rebek'ah Lieberman
"Father/Daughter Dance"
Andrew Kirshner
"I'm Gonna Do a Little Dance"
Bill Goldsmith, Richard Lehmann
"Knoxville Road"
Ellen Micca
"Peter"
Mike Svezia
"I sing for my supper"
Gerry Dantone
"Master of Low Expectations"
Estelle Henrich
"Bill & Noah"
Susanne Ernst
"Courage"
Tony Tedeschi
"Cry for the Little Children"
Walter Sargent
"Some Things Never Change"
Bob Campbell
"I Ain't Got Nothing to Prove"
Bruce Kanin
"Remember Me"
Lois Morton
"I'll Remember You"
Frank Gambino
"You Can Lead a Horse to Water"
Pedro Pereira
"Nobody"
Sigh Nguyen
"When you lied to me"
Sigh and Thuyen Nguyen
"Kaleidoscope"
Conrad Tyras
"Imagine Me Without You"
Guy Pezullo
"Quicksand Crowd"



Bob Campbell and Frank Gambino are the Sept. 16th University Cafe players.

What's Doin'

ISS members are always out and about. Check your local listings for appearances live, on the radio or even on TV. Go to www.islandsongwriters.org for gigs and links to member sites with information about CD releases, shows and MP3s. Here's what's happening in the coming weeks. (*Check with the venue first because dates and times may change.*)

ISS Workshop

Test out your songs in front of fellow musicians, who provide constructive feedback. The workshop is on the first day of each month at **Five Towns College, Burrs Lane**, Dix Hills. Run by ISS Director **Sonny Speed**, It starts at 7:30 p.m. Bring a guitar to perform your song live, or you may choose to play a CD or tape. A piano is available for keyboardists. Be sure to bring 25 copies of your lyrics so other workshops attendees can follow along and provide feedback.

Next workshop: Sept. 13

University Cafe

Look who's playing at Stony Brook in coming months:

August 19: Blues Jam. All invited.

Sept. 16: Bob Campbell. Don't forget, an open mic follows the featured performers.

Writer's Choice: Conrad Tyras Wins

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Bob Campbell brought "The Gathering" which sounded much better than a protest song has any right to sound while lyrically being reasonable and non-hysterical. If you don't think that's a big deal, *you* try writing a protest song.

Yours truly was the other runner-up for "To the Fundamentalists," another song about the times we live in. I would hope that such songs would not be necessary for much longer, but my advice is, "Don't hold your breath."

Gerry Dantone is nearing completion of his band UniversalDice.com's third CD, which will contain "To the Fundamentalists" among other complaints.

Open Mics

Borders, Jericho Turnpike, Syosset, hosted by Bill Ryan or Vincent Crici, first Thursday of the month. Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. *Next gig: August 5.*

Starbucks, Main Street, Huntington, 7 p.m. Mondays.

Pisces Cafe, Railroad Ave, Babylon, 8 p.m. Wednesdays.

University Cafe

Suny/Stony Brook, hosted by **Sonny Speed**, 8:30 p.m. third Thursday of the month. Featured performers followed by open mic. *Next gig: August 19.*

Borders Showcase

Borders, Old Country Road, Westbury, hosted by **Rich Stein**, 8 p.m. third Friday of the month. *Next gig: August 20.*

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